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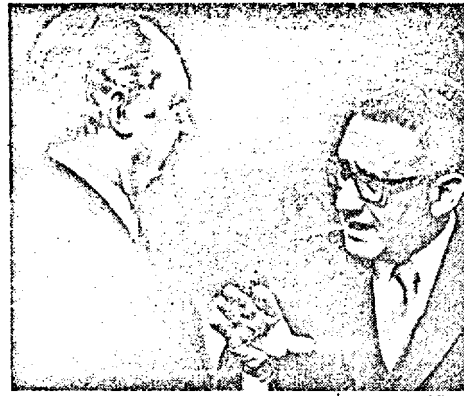
NIXON'S SECRET BOMBING SURVEY

Even some of Richard Nixon's closest aides were puzzled by his sudden resumption of massive bombing of North Vietnam. For the dubious effectiveness of bombing as a strategic policy in Indochina was indicated to Mr. Nixon in the early days of his Presidency. Immediately after his Inauguration, the President instructed his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, to undertake a thorough review of U.S. military policy in Vietnam. The result was National Security Study Memorandum No. 1, a 548-page document that, like all such reports, is classified "Secret." This week, Sen. Mike Gravel of Alaska, who last year helped make the Pentagon papers public, plans to read NSSM 1 into the Congressional Record. Below, NEWSWEEK publishes for the first time excerpts from NSSM 1's appraisal of the effectiveness of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam during the Johnson Administration.

The study is a prime example of Kissinger's exhaustive attention to detail. Calling on the resources of the State Department, the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, he posed more than two dozen searching, even scholarly, questions about the conduct of the war. And, like the stern professor he once was, Kissinger often tossed back the answers for more rigorous thought. But despite the monumental investment of time and energy, the resulting paper seemed curiously ill-suited to the Administration's policy purposes. Indeed, as high White House officials have privately admitted, NSSM 1 revealed a disturbing number of differences in how the various agencies saw the U.S. role in Indochina.

On the question of bombing, the disagreements were clear. While admitting that the bombing had plainly not "paralyzed" Hanoi, the State Department under William Rogers emphasized the cumulative strain on North Vietnam of the long aerial bombardment. Melvin Laird's Pentagon analysts pointed out that, despite all the adverse effects on the North Vietnamese people—including an estimated 52,000 civilian casualties—the bombing only seemed to have rallied the people behind Hanoi. CIA Director Richard Helms and his staff took the most unequivocal stand of all, asserting that "the air war did not seriously affect the flow of men and supplies to Communist forces in Laos and South Vietnam. Nor did it significantly erode North Vietnam's military defense capability or Hanoi's determination to persist in the war."

On one point, however, opinion was unanimous: Soviet and Chinese aid had been crucial in helping Hanoi weather



Kissinger, Rogers (left): Probing

It may have had a significant impact on Mr. Nixon's thinking when, two weeks ago, he ordered resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam. Given the strong evidence that bombing had been of limited military value in Vietnam, the President presumably did not cherish the belief that he could defeat the North Vietnamese with his Air Force. Instead, his current aerial assault on North Vietnam seems designed primarily to serve diplomatic and psychological purposes.

NSSM 1, which reached Mr. Nixon's desk early in 1969, read, in part, as follows:

What is the evidence on the scale of effect of B-52 attacks in producing Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army casualties? In disrupting VC/NVA operations? How valid are estimates of over-all effect?

STATE DEPARTMENT: Although POW and [defector] statements and captured documents attest to significant casualties resulting from specific missions, the available evidence is insufficient for a confident estimate of the over-all scale of these casualties. There is little evidence to suggest that these [missions] have succeeded in inflicting a scale of losses on the VC/NVA sufficient to significantly disrupt tactical operations or to force the Communists to alter their basic strategy for South Vietnam... [However,] MACV operational reports have repeatedly noted that tactical air support air strikes in South Vietnam have disrupted Communist combat plans...

CIA: The few existing studies and the available raw intelligence make it clear that B-52 strikes do account for a substantial number of casualties, have effectively disrupted VC/NVA operations, and have a strong adverse psychological impact on enemy troops. Unfortunately, [it is] impossible to arrive at any quantitative measurement of the effect of B-52 strikes that can be regarded with confidence. Recent [studies by the Joint Chiefs of Staff] would indicate a kill ratio of .74 per sortie, or an implied [kill] rate of 1,300 per month during 1968. Thus... B-52 attacks in South Vietnam may

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